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ABSTRACT

An informal guide to the self-evaluation of school and college foreign language programs is presented. Its purpose is to suggest guidelines to departments that have not yet developed their own full evaluative procedures. Questions relate to: (1) philosophy and goals; (2) curriculum, methods, materials, and facilities; (3) faculty training and involvement; (4) ancillary activities; and (5) evaluative procedures. Each of the five areas treats many sub-topics relating to ccurse objectives, department goals and rationale, various kinds of tests, teaching the four skills, the role of grammar, provision for the individuality of students, articulation between levels of instruction, culture, student-teacher ratio, promotion of professional growth activities, method of choosing texts, extra-curricular foreign language activities, and all types of evaluation procedures. No single methodological approach is emphasized. (Author/AMH)

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SELF-EVALUATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS IN OHIO

Articulation and Curriculum Committee

Ohio Modern Language Teachers Association

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SELF-EVALUATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS IN OHIO

The Articulation and Curriculum Committee of the OMLTA requests that all FL departments in the state of Ohio (pre-high school, secondary, and college-university levels) conduct a thorough self-evaluation. This recommendation does not imply a present lack of critical self-assessment; many individual instructors and entire faculties have long been involved in such a process. But we are interested in suggesting some possible guidelines to those who may not yet have developed a full evaluative procedure.

Self-evaluation can take many forms. We believe it would be appropriate to raise and attempt to answer at least some of the following questions during the review process. It is not our intention to prescribe to anyone a specific set of methods and objectives of FL instruction.

A. Philosophy and Goals

1. Have course objectives at all levels been clearly defined?

2. Has the department determined the ultimate goals of its instructional program?

3. What is the rationale for the relative emphasis placed on teaching of the various language skills?

4. What approach(es) to FL instruction do you prefer? Why?

5. Has the department developed a rationale for the study of FLs? Have individual teachers worked out such a rationale?

6. In the department's view, what is the relative importance of an authentic FL accent, on one hand, and the ability to comprehend and communicate ideas in the FL (with minor phonetic imperfections), on the other?

B. Curriculum and Methodology; Facilities

1. Are systematic efforts made to orient students regarding FL study prior to their entering the program?

2. Do students have opportunities to explore FL learning and culture before entering a regular course sequence?

3. Is a placement examination or FL aptitude instrument administered? If so, how are the results used? To help determine students' probability of success in Fl courses? To diagnose students' individual language-learning strengths and weaknesses? To exclude certain students from FL study? Are these procedures as effective as might be desired?

4. Are listening and speaking taught in the framework of meaningful contexts? Do instructors relate exercises to their students' personal experience?

5. How is writing taught? How much can students be expected to write in the FL by the end of the intermediate course (college year 2, high school year 4)?

6. Is grammar in beginning courses presented logically? Systematically? Are the most useful patterns introduced first? Are any major grammatical points not covered in the basic program? Why?

7. Is pronunciation taught systematically? How is it integrated into the instructional program?

8. Is intonation stressed? How?

9. What factors determine the choice of reading materials?

   a. Literary value of texts?

   b. Critical and popular reputation of the author?

   c. Type of writing (literature, history, civilization, journalism, etc.)?

   d. Timeliness? Discussion of current events and issues?

   e. Teachability of texts and inclusion of pedagogical apparatus?

   f. Cultural interest?

   g. Whether works are complete or extracts?

   h. Genre (e.g., poetry, drama, prose fiction)?

   i. Language level (syntactical difficulty of readings, kinds of vocabulary introduced)?

   j. Other factors?

10. To what extent does the curriculum take into account the individuality of students?

    a. Is there a program of individualized instruction? If so, has it been successful? How is the program evaluated?

    b. Do you have a tracking system, with various sections placing different emphasis on the basic skills.

    c. What special steps, if any are taken to benefit students with minimal interest in FLs?

d. Are there provisions for accelerated instruction of exceptionally gifted students (e.g., honors program, independent study)?

e. Is the same curricular package offered to short-term and long-term students (i.e., those taking only the elementary and intermediate FL courses as opposed to those planning to do advanced work)? Why?

11. Have possible implications of recent research in FL theory and methodology been considered? Implemented in the classroom?

12. Are the various levels coordinated with each other? For example, does the intermediate program build on material and techniques introduced in the beginning course?

13. Is there coordination within a level of instruction? For instance, do all those teaching a multi-section course agree on items to be covered, methods of presentation and testing techniques? Are multi-section exams given? If so, is their grading standardized?

14. Have attemps been made to learn what other schools in your area are doing in FL instruction?

15. If yours is a high school program, do you maintain two-way communication with guidance counselors regarding program objectives and content, selection and placement of students, trends in college FL requirements, opportunities for college credit by proficiency exam, FL-related career information, etc.?

16. If yours is a high school program, have you attempted to coordinate your instruction with that of college FL departments in your area?

17. If yours is a college program, have you attempted to coordinate your instruction with that of high school FL departments in your area?

18. Do you have study abroad programs? If so, do they have an academic or study-tour basis? Are they an integral part of the department's educational mission? Is academic credit granted to participants? How are the credentials of host-country instructors assessed?

19. Is there a departmental consensus as to aspects of foreign culture and civilization that should be taught? What differences exist, if any, between the kinds of cultural material presented in the elementary course and in advanced courses? If there is a distinction, on what is it based?

20. Is culture presented objectively? Are the foreign country's weaknesses discussed as well as its strengths? Why or why not?

21. Do tests adequately cover material studied? Do tests reflect classroom teaching techniques?

22. Is your instructional program coordinated with that of other departments? Is interdisciplinary course work offered? Do you have team-taught classes?

23. Are innovative courses encouraged? If so, in what ways?

24. Is the entire FL curriculum offered every year? If not, do problems result?

25. Is there an adequate teacher-student ratio in your classes? If not, what is being done to remedy the situation?

26. How often are instructors permitted to change books? Is this arrangement acceptable?

27. Is there a formal procedure for measuring what students have learned over a long period (e.g., pre-graduation comprehensive exams, oral and/or written)?

28. Are language laboratory facilities adequate? If not, are improvements being planned? Will available funding be sufficient?

29. Are audio-visual materials provided? If so, what use is made of them? Are they sufficient in number and variety?

30. Are faculty members expected to be familiar with the operation of lab equipment and classroom teaching devices?

31. Do you offer adult-education and/or other extended-learning classes? If so, are such programs successful? Is academic credit granted for this work?

C. Faculty Training and Involvement

1. Are formal professional growth activities required or encouraged (e.g., additional course work, research and publication, workshops, study and travel abroad)? Does the school facilitate stays by teachers in a country where the target language is spoken?

2. Are individual instructors allowed to choose texts and other teaching materials? If not, why not?

3. Who hires FL instructors at your school? Is there adequate faculty input?

4. Are faculty members involved in local, state, and national FL organizations? Does such participation tangibly affect the quality of your program?

5. Do faculty members provide effective academic advising? How is the quality of counseling determined?

6. Is FL career counseling given? Are teachers aware of employment opportunities available to FL students?

D. Ancillary Activities

1. Do you provide extracurricular activities dealing with FLs (e.g., conversation hours, events in language houses or dormitories, FL week)?

2. In what ways, aside from grades, is the achievement of outstanding FL students recognized and rewarded?

E. Evaluation Procedures

1. Are the teaching materials being used in courses evaluated regularly? By what means?

2. Is there an ongoing peer evaluation process in the department? Why or why not? Does peer evaluation include visits by faculty members to each other's classes?

3. How do administrators evaluate faculty performance? Is there an acceptable grievance procedure for teachers who feel they have been judged unfairly?

4. Is there a formal procedure (as opposed to random feedback) for evaluation, by students, of teachers and courses? Why or why not? If so, what role do student evaluations play in program changes and in consideration of faculty for retention, increments, promotions, and tenure?

5. What are the instructional program's chief strengths and weaknesses? What steps are being taken to correct any deficiencies?